

## **Historic, Archive Document**

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



11-2 Raw

## THE EARLY DAYS IN BOYS' AND GIRLS' CLUB WORK

A radio talk by J. A. Evans, Office of Cooperative Extension Work, delivered through WRC and 42 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, June 18, 1931.

— oOo —

Boys' and Girls' Club Work had its official beginning in the Boys' Corn Clubs organized in 8 counties in Mississippi in 1908, with a total enrollment of 1,700 boys. These clubs were the first ever organized on a demonstration basis and differed radically from the school garden work with boys previously carried on in many States, in at least three particulars. Boys were required to plant an acre, which made the use of teams and improved implements necessary; the elements of costs and profits were included; and each boy was expected to follow specific instructions given for growing the crop.

The organization of such clubs was a natural outgrowth of the experiences of the early county agents who often found that adult farmers, especially in sections where there were no boll weevil, were hard to interest in growing corn, but were usually willing to let their boys undertake a demonstration. In such cases they noticed that the father soon became interested in the boy's demonstration and often adopted the same methods in growing his own crop.

The experience of Tom Marks, a pioneer county agent in Jack County, Texas, and now county agent in Harmon County, Oklahoma, is typical. Inspired by Railroad officials, Marks planned a corn show in the county, the exhibits to be supplied from corn demonstration farms. To his chagrin only three adult farmers would undertake to conduct corn demonstration. The show that fall was, of course, a failure. His friends tried to console him by saying "It is hard to teach an old dog new tricks," and Marks replied, "I am going to try the young dogs next year, come and see my corn show next fall." He did try the young dogs and his corn show next year was a success.

W. H. Smith, county superintendent of Holmes County, Mississippi, was the first county club agent in history, although that was not his title. He was appointed as a collaborator in the U. S. Department of Agriculture on November 11, 1907 for the purpose of organizing corn clubs on the demonstration plan, in connection with the rural schools of his county.

Three other Mississippi county school superintendents, Ira G. Allen, W. R. Day and Thos. A. Early, received like appointments at Dr. Knapp's request early in 1908. These four county superintendents and the State and district demonstration agents in Mississippi who vigorously promoted the corn club plan, H. E. Savely, B. L. Moss, H. D. Tate and A. S. Meharg, are entitled to be considered as the pioneer 4-H club workers in the United States.

Satisfied with this trial of his plan, Dr. Knapp now arranged to extend the corn club work to other States as a permanent feature of the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work. For this purpose, Prof. O. B. Martin was appointed as a special agent in March 1909 and brought into the Washington office to head up the club work in all the Southern States.

Corn Club Work was started in Arkansas, Georgia, Virginia, South Carolina and other States at once. In four of these States the bankers furnished a trip to Washington for the State club winner as the capital prize. Elmer Falter of Arkansas, Bascomb Usher of South Carolina, DeWitt Lundy of Mississippi and Ralph Bellwood of Virginia received these prizes and were brought to Washington that fall. They received much attention for their achievement, were received by the Secretary of Agriculture and given the first diplomas ever issued by him to boys for excellence in agriculture. This first gathering of the 4 club winners in Washington might be considered the original National 4-H Club Camp.

With the Boys' Club Work well started Dr. Knapp now began to think about club work for the girls and in 1910 it was started. Miss Marie S. Cromer of Aiken, South Carolina, a teacher who had on her own initiative organized a small tomato growing club in connection with her school work was the pioneer agent. State girls club agents were appointed in several of the States soon after and Boys' and Girls' Club Work was thus established as a permanent feature of agricultural and home economics Extension Work.